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Committees
Economic Development, Small
Business and Regulatory Reform VC
Families and Human Services VC
Government Operations
Health Policy

The Jacobs Report

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HOUSE LEGISLATES DIVORCE REQUIREMENTS

Parents seeking divorce would be required to attend a program on the effects of separation under legislation approved Thursday by a House committee. The package of bills (HB 5467, HB 5468, HB 5469, HB 5470, HB 5472, HB 5473 and HB 5474) would apply to divorces involving minor children.

The bills also would lengthen the marriage license waiting period from three to 28 days. A couple could circumvent the longer time frame by completing four hours of premarital counseling. The legislation also creates a check-off box on marriage certificates to show if the couple received the counseling.

Supporters of the bills said that these measures are an answer to high divorce rates. Most of the bills cleared the Judiciary Committee on essentially party-line votes, with Republicans in support and Democrats in opposition or abstaining.

"I'm so excited to see this legislation progress," said Rep. Joanne Voorhees (R-Wyoming). "Encouraging strong marriages and families is common sense and a priority for me."

The divorce and premarital counseling classes would be acceptable if performed by the government, a house of religious worship or other nonprofit organization. If one party refused to participate in the required divorce program, then the judge would be allowed to find in favor of the other party in divorce proceedings.

The divorce class would be waived in cases where one party has taken legal action against domestic violence by the other party in the marriage.

Some lawmakers see the bills as intrusive and ineffective. Rep. Paul Condino (D-Southfield), a committee member, called the bills an attempt to "legislate love." He cited data showing that Florida's divorce rate has not improved after enacting a similar law in 1997.

"I for one don't want to get involved with personal choices and personal decisions in relationships," he said.

The bills now go to the full House for consideration.

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SUNDAY DRINKING BACK TO NOON

The Senate reversed course on language to lift the statewide prohibition on Sunday morning alcohol sales, dropping an amendment added to HB 5500 in the Economic Development, Small Business and Regulatory Reform Committee last week. Instead, the chamber restored the bill to only deal with liquor sales on Sundays in the four counties of the Upper Peninsula in the Central Time Zone.

Monday through Saturday, liquor sales are permitted from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m.

Sen. Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) said by limiting sales until after noon on Sundays, the state is hurting small businesses. Local governments could still put restrictions on if they chose if the statewide ban were dropped.

“We’re just trying to make Sunday like any other day,” she said.

Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) took exception, claiming that extending the chance to sell liquor on Sunday would add to drinking problems.

“Sunday is a day you think of church and family,” said Scott Ray, Chief of Staff for Sen. Alan Sanborn (R-Richmond Twp), chair of the Economic Development Committee. “It’s traditional just as much as anything else, and from a traditional standpoint, to allow bars to sell alcohol on Sunday morning goes against the grain. It’s not the American way.”

Senator Jacobs’ camp disagreed, noting that most states have done away with blue laws. “It’s an antiquated law that serves no purpose. It’s anti-business, anti-consumer,” said Jacobs staffer Matt Levin. “You can put forth all of the religious reasons you want, but we all don’t practice the same religion, and that doesn’t make us un-American.”

Stripped of the Jacobs amendment, the Senate did provide that Central Time Zone that border Wisconsin can sell liquor starting at noon, Eastern Time, which is 11 a.m., Central Time.

HOUSE SENDS RACINO BILL TO CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Negotiations on legislation allowing slot machines at the state’s horse racetracks can now begin in earnest with the House overwhelmingly voting Tuesday against a Senate plan for racinos.

The House wants to see most of the revenues from racinos earmarked toward agricultural items, but the Senate prefers depositing most of the money into the state’s general fund, where it would be up for grabs among all programs.

Only three House members voted to send the Senate plan to Governor Jennifer Granholm as the House rejected HB 4612 on a 3-100 vote. The move sends the bill to a House-Senate conference committee.

Rep. Sal Rocca (R-Sterling Heights), one of those who supported the Senate plan, said he preferred the money going to the general fund than the House’s proposal, which would have dedicated some money to the city of Detroit. Some Detroit lawmakers agreed to back the bill in exchange for the revenue earmark to their city because of concerns that racinos would diminish gambling at Detroit’s three casinos, which give considerable revenue to city government.

It could be months before racino negotiations pick up again. Governor Granholm has said she wants the budget resolved first.

The House conferees are Rep. Julian (R-Lennon), Rep. Tom Meyer (R-Bad Axe) and Rep. Jack Minore (D-Flint). Senate conferees have not yet been named.

TOP ISSUES OF THE WEEK (as tabulated from e-mails, letters and telephone calls)

1. Refusal of Care Bills

House Bills 5006, 5276, 5277 and 5278 would allow doctors and pharmacists to refuse treatment when they choose to do so for religious reasons. This week, we have received no e-mails in support of this package and hundreds against it.

2. Forestry Bills

A vast majority of e-mails were from environmentalists urging the senator to support an amendment removing the tie-bar to House Bill 5554, Senate Bill 1023 and Senate Bill 1024. She did, but the legislation passed anyway.

3. Various Budget Issues

Many programs are, or have been rumored to be, on the cutting table for budget negotiations. People have been writing to support continuation of the programs they see as vital to Michigan's future.

All Michigan legislation can be tracked at <http://www.legislature.michigan.gov/> .

State Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Franklin, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Families & Human Services Committee and the Economic Development, Small Business & Regulatory Reform Committee. She also serves on the Government Operations and Health Policy Committees.

Constituents of the 14th District may contact Senator Jacobs at sengjacobs@senate.michigan.gov or toll-free at 1-888-937-4453.

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